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ABSTRACT

Although more than 52 percent of the current college and university student body is comprised of women, institutional leadership is still dominated by males. This digest summarizes the issue from an institutional context and identifies factors that contribute to the gap. It suggests that the organizational and societal concepts of leadership be viewed from an alternative, feminist frame of reference noting the different leadership styles of men and women. The glass ceiling in higher education is seen as the result of a male-dominated organizational structure that places stumbling blocks in the career paths of many women faculty. A more feminist leadership style is urged as a way to change institutional hierarchies and structures. And because organizational culture also affects curriculum and administration, it is suggested that this more inclusive style of leadership would create institutions with values grounded in community and service to constituents. Suggestions to achieve such change include: the elimination of the collective campus behaviors and actions that create a chilly climate for women and minorities, and development of an organizational consensus to combat the institutionalized structures and norms that exclude women. (CH)

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Analyzing the Gender Gap

Luba Chliwniak

WHERE'S THE GENDER GAP?

Only 16% of college and university women are presidents, only 13% of chief business officers are women, and only 25% of chief academic officers are women. Yet, more than 52% of the current student body comprises women. While colleges and universities are dominated by male leadership, however, concerns regarding administrative procedures that exclude women and create chilly campus climates continue to plague academic institutions. Many believe that by closing the leadership gap, institutions would become more centered on process and persons (described as feminized concerns) rather than focused on tasks and outcomes (attributed to masculine styles of leadership).

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES OF INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT?

Most of us are intellectually aware of the complexity of women's situation and recognize that it needs to be viewed in a broad historical context of inclusion and exclusion. By exploring women's place in higher education institutions historically and currently, the lack of women's leadership is analyzed to determine the reasons for the gap and persistence factors in maintaining the gap.

Societal and organizational conceptions of leadership vary according to author's assumptions. However, it is a common notion that leaders are individuals who provide vision and meaning for an institution and embody the ideals toward which the organization strives. Five common frames of reference for organizational structures inform us that leadership within these structures are traditionally conceived. Most conceptions of organizations assume that leadership emanates from the apex of a hierarchy. A sixth frame, A Web of Inclusion, is offered as an alternative, feminized frame of reference.

WOMEN AND MEN LEADERS: DIFFERENT OR ALIKE?

A problematic issue is that leadership traditionally has been studied using male norms as the standard for behaviors. As noted by Desjardins, Acker, Gutek, and others, women adopted male standards of success to better fit into male-dominated hierarchical structures and systems. Traditional scholars, such as Birnbaum and Mintzberg, view leaders as being alike and genderless. However, scholars such as Barrie Thorne and Deborah Tannen, who research gender differences, posit that social norms and issues of gender-role ascription create differences between women and men.

Carol Gilligan's research on cognitive development has provided impetus for many of today's scholars to explore and revise leadership as we knew it. Gilligan argues that a single model of reasoning patterns and stages of moral development fails to capture the different realities of women's lives. By offering two different modes of reasoning patterns, a more complex but better understandable explanation for the human experience would also be more inclusive. Sally Helgesen, for example, examines how women chief executive officers make decisions, gather and dispense information, delegate tasks, structure their organizations, and motivate their employees. She concludes that women leaders place more emphasis on relationships, sharing, and process, while male CEOs, as per Mintzberg's studies, focus on completing tasks, achieving goals, hoarding of information, and winning. Gilligan's work identified a separate development pathway that results in personal and relational responsibility
being of highest value for females and legalistic justice for individuals being highest for males. Therefore, as described by several authors, while men are more concerned with systems and rules, women are more concerned with relations and atmosphere.

DOES THE GENDER GAP MATTER?

Many authors have produced scholarship surrounding women's way of knowing compared with men's way of knowing. Recent scholarship speculates how these gender differences impact on the values held by leaders, and how these values influence institutional structures and infrastructures. If styles and approaches are indistinguishable between women and men, the gender gap is a numerical inequity and should be corrected for ethical reasons. But, if leadership approaches are different, the gender gap may represent an impediment to potential institutional improvements.

THE GLASS CEILING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Through intact male-dominated structures, men in organizations have come to view their perspectives and norms as being representative of gender-neutral, human organizational structures, and assume the structure is "asexual." Sheppard found that these male filters render women's experiences as invisible. Subtle, indirect obstacles as a result of labeling or stereotyping place stumbling blocks in the career paths of many women. Cultural artifacts in higher education, such as tenure-track standards, pedagogical practices, marginalizing of certain studies and scholarship, apparently preserve "appropriate" and different spheres for men and women in academe. A remedial vision--that is, one that is not seen through the eyes of only males--would add depth and new perspectives for shared images of posthierarchical institutional structures in higher education.

IMPLICATIONS TO THE INSTITUTION

Organizational culture effects curriculum and administration in that resources are allocated based on the values of the institution. Several scholars contend that a leader with an emerging, inclusive style of leadership could provide an institution with new values and ethics grounded in cooperation, community, and relationships within the community. Higher education's leadership also needs to become more reflective of the constituents it serves.

Several actions that can be taken to bring about this change. Clearly, it is easier to promote change when in a position of authority. Transformational leadership develops organizational consensus and empowers those who are like-minded in their goals. Further, since patriarchy has been organized through men's relationships with other men, a similar unity among women is an effective means by which to combat institutionalized forms and norms that exclude women. And, regardless of position, women in higher education need to become more aware when the sense of being a marginal member or an unequal member of the academy impedes performance. A first step in this process is the elimination of campus micro-inequities, those behaviors and actions which create a chilly campus climate for women and minority groups.

It is important to remain vigilant to the effects of organizational norms, structures, and systems for many of the issues encompassed within the gender gap are a result of systems and not individuals. However, because they are only systems, they can be examined and changed. Furthermore, of most importance in the process of change is the recognition that equality cannot be externally assigned until it has been internally perceived by institutional members. By attending to traditional institutional practices such as exclusionary tenure criteria, sexual harassment, and wage gaps, incremental but effective changes can reshape institutional culture, and the associated images of leaders and leadership in higher education.

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